13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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was twisted into a three-stranded plait. Standing back at a mark, the reapers threw their spinning hooks at it in turn until it was severed and 'stretched'. At this a triumphant shout was raised. The cailleach was sometimes 'waked' before it was lifted: the 'corpse' was hung round the neck of the triumphant slayer, who was guest at the subsequent 'churn' (the harvest feast and dance) and who was fated to be the reaper who would be first married. It was, perhaps, more usual for the cailleach to be put around the neck of the master or mistress of the house. From the threat of being hanged by it they would purchase their freedom by providing the churn supper, for which special food was prepared. There are many variant practices but it is clear that they all turn on the same themes, the spirit of the corn and the luck of a speedy harvest. In some districts the cailleach was known as the hare, and the cry which kept the toiling shearers to their task was; 'We'll put the hare out of it today!'

It was customary to hang the churn in the kitchen, either over the door, on the dresser, or about the chimney hearth, and to keep it until the following harvest, when it was given to the cows. Or it might be fed to the horses on the first day of ploughing. In some houses the last sheaf was preserved year after year, and I have seen specimens half a century old. One of these was dressed with coloured papers, hinting that there was formerly more ceremony connected with the last sheaf than has survived. These dressed cailleachs figure in the harvest festival decoration in some churches in Co. Armagh, where also miniature corn ricks surmounted by a harvest knot are displayed, the Church thus having won over and preserved the pagan symbols of harvest (See Tailpiece).

Harvest knots or bows are decorative twists of straw which were worn by the harvesters, and are still quite commonly carried by young men at harvest time in some districts (Plate 13, 1). Girls would wear them in their hair, boys in their coats, and in former times they were exchanged by the sexes as a sign of mutual attachment. They are made in a fine plait of two straws tied into loops or interlaced, those worn by the girls having the ears of the corn left on. The best examples are made from wheat, and some exceptionally fine specimens are made from

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243 [301] grasses and flax. The many practical uses of straw will be described in a later chapter and its employment in fashioning various kinds of dolls, ceremonial dresses and masks, for example on St. Briget's Day. Certain protective charms were also made of oat-straw, for example the Bratóg Brighde (St. Briget's rag or mantle) worn by the fishermen of Tory Island as a protection against storms. Here the explanation may lie in the power of wind over bits of loose straw which by association gives the straw the secret of controlling the wind. This is the basis of the phrase used in Co. Cavan to describe something which circulates quickly: 'going round like the straws'. It was the custom to ward off storms by running with a handful of straws from one farm to another.

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With corn, as with hay and turf, the harvesting proceeds by building up stooks and ricks of increasing size according to the nature of the crop and the weather conditions. Little stooks (footings) of four or six sheaves are the first stage in the construction of the twelve-sheaf stooks (ten standing and two inverted hooding sheaves) which, however, are generally confined to wheat (Fig. 51). It is the general practice to build the little stooks of corn, after one or two weeks' seasoning, into hand-stacks which are of a convenient size to make a load for the rick-shifter, or for the tractor-lifter which is replacing it. The shapes of these miniature stacks, varying from one district to another, are often extremely picturesque, and their serried rows marching up the hillsides give the autumn fields a populated appearance. Their many names (hut, shig, bart, adag, and so on) would indicate that they are no novelty, and these little field stacks are as characteristic of Wales and Scotland as they are of Ireland (Fig. 52). A picturesque variety of hay-stack, commonly seen in Connacht, is the sheep-cock, built around a tall pole which prevents the cock from collapsing when eaten away at the base.

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County Armagh

PLATE 13

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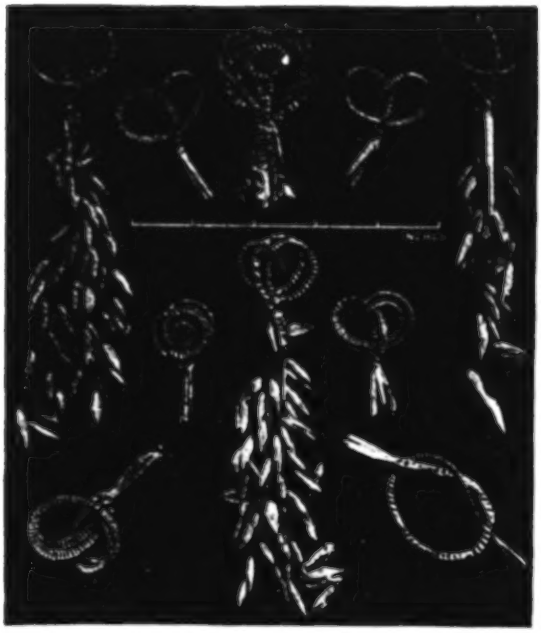

1. Harvest knots, Co. Armagh.

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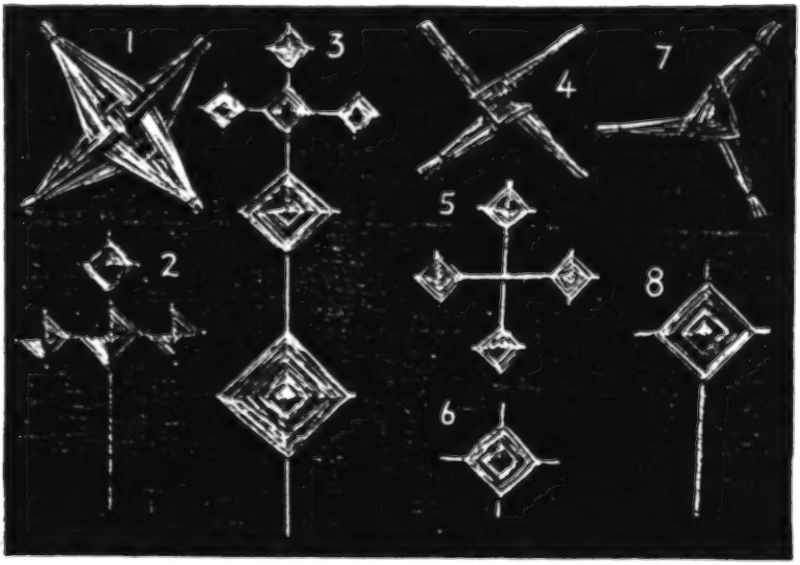

2. Bridget's Crosses, Co. Armagh.

[facing p. 192]

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285 415 ancient origin. We shall see that it is the way the Boyne curraghs are built, and it is said that the African pygmies make their carrying baskets in similar fashion. For lightness and to facilitate lifting one or more rows of open 'windows' are left in the sides of the creels. Those used for seaweed were sometimes quite open in construction, and like the manure pots they were generally fitted with hinged bottoms for unloading (Fig. 56).

301 524 285 Besides their utilitarian uses, rushes, grasses and straw have long been playthings for young folk who fashion out of them, for love or for luck, many varieties of decorations and emblems. We describe the Briget's Crosses elsewhere (Fig. 85). Harvest knots, twisted out of the ripe straw of harvest, seem formerly [832] to have been in truth love tokens, though now worn merely as buttonholes for the harvest fair (Plate 13). As one might expect, the girls' knots were the more ornate and they differed from those worn by the boys in having the ears left attached. Some exceptionally fine specimens are fashioned out of flax or fine wild grasses. Star-shaped emblems in these materials are also made (Fig. 70). More complicated knots have four or six strand work, but the ordinary knots are in two ply, made by bending the straws sharply over each other at right angles. Before being knotted they make tolerably strong cords: I have experimented with these on unbaked clay pots and find that when impressed in the soft clay they make very good imitations of the 'cord impressions' seen on Bronze Age pottery. I have heard that in Nigeria the same two-ply technique is employed in making roulettes, from the fibres of the wine palm, for decorating the native pottery. Among the many toys and playthings made of rushes we find baskets for wild strawberries and blaeberries, rattles, butterfly cages, fishing nets, caps, bracelets, belts, hatbands, mock-ceremonial whips, canes and swords and imitation birds' feet and flowers, some of which are shown in Fig. 70. Many of them are associated with particular [517] occasions of the year, for example the imitation flowers with Easter and the blaeberry baskets with Garland Sunday (Chapter XIX) but in general they are the products of the infinite leisure of long summer days of cattle-tending in field, bog or mountain. Probably a number of these objects once had a practical value

 [text continues on p. 210]

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FIG. 70. Rush, grass and straw-work. (1) Cuckoo pint made of rushes, Co. Armagh. (2) Butterfly cage of rushes, Co. Down. (3) Rush bracelet in nine-strand plait, Co. Armagh. (4) 'Hen's claw' of grass, Co. Mayo. (5) 'Briget's rag' of oat straw. Tory Island charm. (6) 'Harvest star' of flax, Co. Antrim. (7) Rush rattle, Co. Mayo. (8) Blaeberry basket of rushes, Co. Down. (9) Harvest knot of flax, Co. Armagh.

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and others were ceremonial; some may be no more than simple pastimes prompted by fancy. Rush baskets were in fact made until recently in some of the Hebridean islands for carrying the fishermen's bait and for holding fish. Baskets of birch twigs, dock stems, ragwort and thistles have also been recorded, and it should be recalled that several examples of grass, sedge, and even moss, made in a similar cross-twisted technique have been recorded from Bronze Age burials in Scotland. The cone-shaped hat of rushes or straw made by children (Fig. 86) recalls in shape at least the traditional headdress of the leprechauns, and it may be noticed that tall steeple hats and helmets seem to have been popular among the Irish down to the seventeenth century.[1] In Co. Kerry the rush hats are worn in mock fights and seem to be regarded as helmets.

Of all these rush toys, none is stranger than the butterfly cage (Fig. 70) which is deftly made by bending long rushes, held upright between the fingers, over others placed transversely. One side of the cage may be left open and a dock leaf inserted as a door. The ends of the rushes are bound together to make a handle. This pastoral plaything can be paralleled in many parts of the world: in the cages in which Spanish shepherd boys carry insects, in the little baskets of dried grass which the Indian herd children make for grasshoppers, in the locust traps which Greek boys, Theocritus tells us, used to weave out of asphodel stalks, and even among the nomads of the Gobi Desert, where, when the cicada begins to call in the great heat, 'every child cuts the desert grass to make a tiny cage to hold one of the fascinating tree-hoppers . . . The Gobi baby's rattle, too, is a hollow ball of twisted grass enclosing a large bead.'[2] The Irish rush rattle is provided with two hazel nuts. Some of the leaves and bracelets are plaited with four, six, nine, or even twelve strands, and a nine strand plait is also seen in one variety of three-cornered Briget's Cross (Fig. 85, 3; Pl. 13, 7).

The conical straw masks and the capes worn by strawboys (Chapter XX, Fig. 88) stripped of their gay ribbons, have been compared with the straw dresses of peasants in Spain or China, and, no doubt, they had their practical prototypes in Ireland.

[1] H. F. McClintock, *Old Irish and Highland Dress*, 88.
[2] M. Cable and F. French, *The Gobi Desert*, 100.

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527 Christianized, cling to the preparations made on St. Briget's Eve, the last day of January. On that day rushes are fashioned into protective charms known as Briget's Crosses, a name 527 which illustrates how the church has won over pagan symbols, 778 for the 'crosses' take the form of either swastikas or lozenges, 301 and comparative evidence suggests that they are magic symbols of suns or eyes (Fig. 85). A three-legged swastika, presumably an old form, is reserved for use in the byre: its shape may be compared with the Celtic triskele. The lozenge-shaped charms have their counterparts in many parts of the world. The Huichols of Mexico make similar charms of wool mounted on a bamboo frame: known as a 'god-eyes', they bring good health and [171] long life to children.[1] A Californian Indian charm made of grass or rushes is very similar. In the Old World similar magic 'squares' have a wide distribution, in Europe, Africa, Tibet, Burma, Assam and Indonesia, and farther afield in Melanesia, Polynesia and Australia. Among the Nagas of Assam the squares, made of coloured thread, are placed on the graves of women and protect them against evil spirits.[2] In Sweden and Estonia straw squares are strung up as Christmas decorations and tied to the straw masks worn during Christmas games (Fig. 85).

Briget's Crosses are believed to protect the house and the livestock from harm and from fire. No evil spirit could pass the charm, which was therefore hung above the door of house and byre. The rushes must be pulled, not cut, on St. Briget's Eve, and care must be taken to fashion the crosses from left to right, with the sun. As a rule they are left in position until replaced the following year, though I have seen byres with many crosses thrust into the underthatch, the decaying accumulation of annual offerings. In Co. Galway similar crosses made of wood or straw were also placed in the rafters at Hallowe'en, and the discovery of a partly burnt rush cross which had been deposited in a megalith in Co. Limerick points to a more general cult of the 'cross'.[3] A 'love-knot' of similar shape, fashioned out of sedge leaves, is known from South Wales.

[1] F. Toor, *A Treasury of Mexican Folkways* (1947), 72.
[2] H. E. Kauffmann, *J.R.A.I.*, 73 (1943), 101, 106.
[3] S. P. O'Riordain, *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, 1 (1936), 36. For a study of Briget's Crosses in Co. Armagh, see T. G. F. Paterson, *U.J.A.*, 8 (1945), 45–48.

 [Text continues on p. 270]

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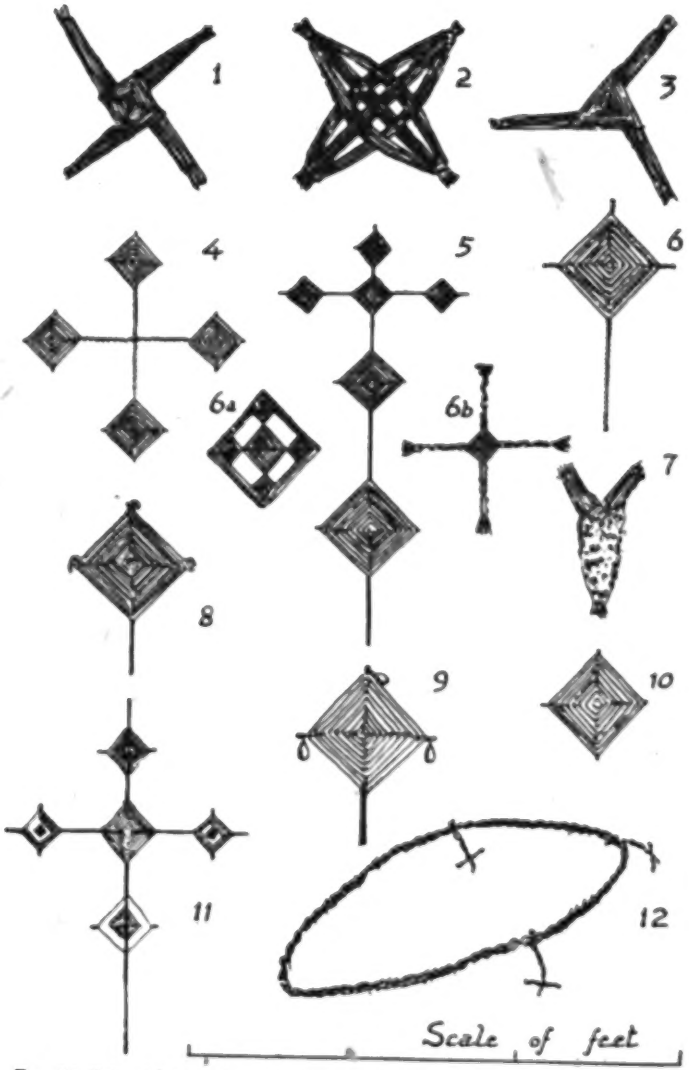

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FIG 85. Briget's Crosses and charms. (1–7) all made of rushes, are from Co. Armagh (in County Museum, Armagh). (8) is a Naga thread-square (after Kauffmann). (9) is a Wailaki charm of rushes (after Kroeber, *Handbook of the Indians of California*). (10) is an Estonian straw-square, worn as decoration on straw hats at Christmas (see Fig. 88, 5). (11) is a Mexican 'God-eyes' made of woven wool (after Toor). (12) is a Briget's Girdle (in National Museum, Dublin).

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

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are worn over dark colored sweaters or blue woolen pullover shirts. Most sweaters are imported, although some of simple design are knitted by women, and shirts are sewn from wool sold in the shops. Under the outer layer of clothing are worn 291
lightweight grey woolen undershirts, known as "grey shirts," and heavier white [192]
woolen—"bawneen"—underpants, called "white drawers." The grey shirt is flannel, but the folk use that term to designate homespun wool. Sometimes a bawneen waistcoat is substituted for the vest, and in the heat of the summer may be worn directly over the undershirt. Making up the remainder of the male costume are the ubiquitous Irish visored cap, imported leather or locally manufactured belts and [462]
shoes, and stockings. One of the most time consuming chores of women is knitting [286]
and darning stockings for their husbands and children. [296]

Just as the vest is the most striking item of male apparel, the red or blue skirt, or "petticoat," is the most striking female one, in particular the red petticoat when viewed from afar against the dull colors of sand and limestone. The skirt, [286]
made from imported wool but dyed locally, is gathered and styled with a deep tuck about nine inches from the bottom, and under this in winter is worn an additional bawneen or red skirt. Sometimes a cotton petticoat and knee length "knickers" also are worn, and several layers of cotton "vests" and shirts provide needed warmth beneath the cotton or lightweight woolen handmade blouse during winter. Blouses are styled alike with collars, long sleeves, and buttons down the front, and usually are of subdued plaid material purchased in the shops. However, [301]
somewhat unusual designs and colors are admired, as are brooches worn at the neck of the garment. Black knee length woolen stockings and black leather shoes, both procured in the shops, encase the feet. Over the shoulders may be worn a multi-colored or red island crocheted shawl of small size, called a "shawleen." In winter and when attending church, women wear heavy brown woolen paisley or black shawls outdoors which cover the head. The black shawl can be bought on the mainland, but the paisley shawl is no longer available.

Infants of both sexes until toilet trained are clothed in plain bawneen dresses. Then boys don short pants of varying length made from homespun wool, [178]
which are worn with white sweaters or blue shirts. Corduroy trousers and jackets are coming into vogue for everyday wear, but on Sunday the white sweater always [292]
is worn. Older boys wear long woolen trousers or britches and blue shirts, and children of all ages go barefooted or put on sandals during the summer and add hand knit stockings in winter. Girls past infancy wear frocks sewn by their mothers, bought in the shops, or sent by relatives from abroad. Whether shoes and stockings are worn depends on the weather, and girls don sweaters and coats over their dresses to afford them protection against the cold. Hairbows provide the only decoration.

Underclothing is changed once a week, and women try to wash clothes [296]
that often as well. A man has at least one old and one new vest, trousers, and shirt, and on Sunday and for special events he will wear his newest articles of clothing; the same can be said of women's petticoats and accouterments. Winter and summer [513]
attire remains the same for both sexes except that some underclothing is shed during the summer, and at night on retiring outer clothing is removed and some